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Buddhist Depiction of Life in the Verse of the Tang Dynasty Poet Han Shan

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**BUDDHIST DEPICTION OF LIFE IN THE VERSE OF THE TANG DYNASTY
POET HAN SHAN**

A Thesis Presented

By

SIJIA NIU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of

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Asian Languages and Literatures

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ABSTRACT

BUDDHIST DEPICTION OF LIFE IN THE VERSE OF THE TANG DYNASTY POET HAN SHAN

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The present work of reading Chinese poetry offers a biographic reading method, but it cannot fit for reading Han Shan's poetry, as he had unclear recording in history. Focused on exploring the persona and religion in Han Shan's poetry world, I examine reading Han Shan's poems in Buddhist way. Chapter 1 provides the biography of Han Shan, and presents his vernacular expression as different from other poets in history. Chapter 2 introduces some new methods on reading poetry brought up by some literature critics. Chapter 3 presents the Buddhist reading method that I have adopted to read and understand Han Shan's poems. This reading method is inspired by the similarity between Han Shan's writings and Buddhist texts. Chapter 4 explains how to read Han Shan's poems in the Buddhist way. In this chapter, I analyze the persona and Buddhist thinking in the world of Han Shan's poetry with the explanation of Buddhist sutras and literatures.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When people talk about how to read poetry, most Chinese readers prefer biographical reading method. At the beginning of the Qing dynasty, scholars exerted great intellectual effort to identify the context in which distinguished Chinese poetry was created. They then arranged them in chronological order. There is a popular belief in Chinese culture that even now continues to echo: if one can reconstruct the events behind every poem, one will have a guide to the poet's emotions and will, thus, understand the poet's life better. However, this biographical reading method has many limitations and has been scrutinized by many scholars, such as W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, and James J. Y. Liu. A major flaw lies within a biographical reading: a reader cannot understand the poetry without the poet's historical background. In this way, the biographical reading method cannot fit a reading of the poet Han Shan, who rarely left background records in history.

In my studies, I prefer to read Han Shan's poetry the same way one would read Buddhist literature. This style of reading derives from three aspects. The first aspect is religious study. Mircea Eliade believed one could benefit from a comparison between the profane and sacred worlds. Religious ideas and behaviors act as an agent in shaping society, and, conversely, society acts as an agent shaping religion. This is similar to Peter

L. Berger proclaiming that man was the product of society; while on the other hand, society was also the product of man. Han Shan in his writings often depicted the comparison between these two worlds and presented its effect on human beings. In the second aspect, which is literature criticism, many critics bring the new perspective of reading poetry. For example: when David K. Schneider discussed how to read Du Fu's poetry (杜甫诗), his focus did not just emphasize the author of the poem, but rather Du as the implied narrator or poetic persona. In addition to this, James J. Y. Liu believed rather than focusing on poets themselves, readers should pay more attention to the "world" in poetry and the language expression of this "world." The third aspect, which pertains to Buddhist sutra literature, "*biyu*" (譬喻) which is translated as parable, is widely used to preach to people, such as in the *Lotus Sutra* and *Vimalakīrti Sutra*. In most of the parable stories, their language is vernacular which can help people easily understand the Buddhist thinking. Moreover, with the language of "*biyu*," Buddhist texts can teach people what is "conventionally" true in specific situations; however, this is not "ultimately" true from an individual perspective. These two features also can be found in Han Shan's poems. His language is vernacular, which is different from other poets in history, and he widely used parables as a method of persuasion in his writing. Many of these parables come directly from Buddhist sutras, for example, the burning house of *Lotus Sutra*.

From Han Shan's Buddhist teaching poetry, the transmission from profane world to religious world is the transmission from suffering to liberation. In Buddhist texts, *The*

First Noble Truth, and *The Second Noble Truth* have particular explanation for “dukkha” (suffering) and “sukha” (liberation), and in Han Shan’s poems, he presented his understanding of these two definitions through detailed description.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY OF HAN SHAN

The vague scholarly description concerning Han Shan's identity was that he was a recluse who lived in the seventh, eighth, or ninth centuries, during the Tang dynasty (c.618-c.907). Han Shan dwelled alone in the Cold Mountain at the famous religious center of Tiantai in southeast China. Later generations used this location — Cold Mountain to give him a name, as his real name was not found in any sources. Though we lost track of Hanshan's real name, we can still find some descriptions from literature portraying his image. Lv Qiuyun, a governor in the Tang dynasty, said in his book *Han Shan Poetry Introduction*:

As for Sir Han Shan, I have no idea who he is. Since old times when people see him, they all call him a lacking and insane scholar. He lives in seclusion in a place named Cold Mountain, but often goes back to Guo Qing mountain. As for the appearance of Han Shan, it is like an impoverished one. His figure is withered and haggard. He makes a hat from birch bark. The cotton and fur on his body are worn out, and he wears geta on the ground. Some times, he sings in the temple gallery: "tut-tut, three circle samsara." Some times at the village, Han Shan gets together with the grazers and singers. In adversity and prosperity, he enjoys his personality. Wise people are able to understand him.¹

¹ Lv Qiuyun, *Complete Tang Poem*, Chapter 162.

Another book, *Tai Ping Guang Ji* (太平廣記),² introduced how the name Han Shan came about:

As for Han Shan, people have no idea about his family name and first name. In the Dali era, he became a hermit in Tian Tai Mountain. This mountain is very deep and thick. When summer comes snow remains on it. For this reason it is also called Cold Mountain, and Han Shan calls himself Han Shan, which means Cold Mountain.³

Besides these few recordings, most people in the later time believed that Han Shan was a Buddhist, while others considered him as a Taoist based on his attitude in the poems. He was a religious believer, but never seemed to be a normal monk living in the organized religious community, despite his close location with Guoqing Buddhist monastery at Tiantai. His writings always contained satire towards the monks, for example: “I see those who leave the household, they do not enter into religious practice.” (我見出家人，不入出家學) Han Shan seemed to have refused to join the religious community, but he had made two good friends coming from the Guoqing monastery, named Fenggan (豐干) and Shide (拾得).

Besides his mysterious background, Han Shan’s composition were also very special.

² Feng Menglong, *Tai Ping Guang Ji*, Volume 55.

³ *Tai Ping Guang Ji* is also translated as extensive Records of Taiping era, it is a collection of stories compiled in early Song dynasty under the direction of Li Fang. It includes over three hundreds book and novels from Han dynasty to early Song dynasty, and it has little description for poet Han Shan in Tang dynasty.

There was claim that his composition was very impromptu, that he would write his poems on any available surface--like the temple walls, tree barks, and even on the ground, and the Buddhists followed would then record his poems after he finished. Since his recordings had no dates or titles, we do not have any testimony as to when he wrote the poems, or when they became popular. Yet, the author Paul Rouzer asserted in his book *On Cold Mountain*: “Han Shan’s writing won a following among Buddhist monks as well as lay believers in the eleventh century. But the readers at that time all treated his poems as the examples of religious literature, rather than the canonical literary texts that belonged to the mainstream Chinese poetry.”⁴ Han Shan’s poems didn’t just have the influence in China, but they also spread to Korea and Japan with the Chan movement, where they become popular among medieval monks and were frequently imitated. In recent decades, Han Shan’s influence has become global--this Chinese poet has made significant impact on Buddhist-inspired American poets and writers ever since 1950s when the poet Gary Snyder translated Han Shan’s poems into English.

⁴ Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Han Shan Poems*, 19-20. Rouzer used the production here referring the poems, even though the poems are produced by the poet, but in my opinion “culture” is more proper word representing poem in more abstract way.

CHAPTER 3

WHY HAN SHAN'S POETRY IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER WORKS FROM THE TIME PERIOD

Even though Han Shan's background is mysterious, it is obvious that Han Shan did not rank with the great poets of the Tang dynasty, like Li Bai (李白 c.701-c.762), Du Fu (杜甫 c.712-c.771), Wang Wei (王維 c.699-c.761), etc. In fact, his poetry, until modern times, has been largely ignored by Chinese literary historians. The long time belief was, in my opinion, that there was little literary value of his work, judging from the vernacular style of the language, which contrasted with the "Modern Style"⁵ (近體詩) and poems of song form (歌行體) in the Tang dynasty. However, modern scholars can hardly submit to this school of thought.

The difference of Han Shan's language in the poems from that of the mainstream Tang elite poetry rests not only on the use of vernacular expressions, but also on the widespread presence of functional words, grammatical connectives, and pronouns. Together, they create a conversational tone. Descriptive parallelism was employed, but it tended to be simpler and more repetitive compared to the complicated pattern found in the elite poets of Tang era. Thus, his poetry would have been easy to understand for

⁵ Modern style, referring to innovations in classical poetry during Tang dynasty (618-907), marked by strict tonal patterns and rhyme schemes.

semiliterate readers at the time. This, however, does not mean that the poems lack sophistication or elegance. After all, even elite poetry can be quite easy to understand. It is also likely that the poet at times deliberately shifted between linguistic ranges for humorous or ironic effect. Thus, the following part will discuss the special features of Han Shan's writing in two aspects: language and expression.

Most of Han Shan's poems were eight lines, each with five characters. Like the common poetry at the same time, the basic structural unit was the couplet. The popularity of these five-character poems in Han Shan's collection may be a reflection of their prevalence among different verse forms during the Tang dynasty. However, it was obvious that Han Shan largely ignored the rules and traditions of regulated verse, and applied "conversation tone" language into his poetry. As for Chinese mainstream poets, when they chased elegance and aesthetics in their writings, they tended to utilize traditional language structures in order to keep the poetic norm in their writings. For example, Xie Lingyun (謝靈運 c.385-c.433), a famous landscape poet in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, always used parallelism in his poems. Here is one example from his landscape poetry:

Ascending Isolated Island in the River

The south of the river, I got tired for seeing,
The north of the river, I have neglected to go and look
around.
I Embrace new things, the path way turns long,
As I find strange scenes, the daylight does not wait.

As for the wild current, I quickly across the river.
The isolated river enchants in the middle of the river.
The cloud and sun reflect each other,
The sky and water refresh each other.
The manifest spirit, no one appreciates it,
The hidden true ones, who for them will pass the word?
I imagine the figure of Kun mountain,
Kun mountain is far away from the karma cycle of the
world.
I begin to trust An Qi's arts,⁶
By them, I will finish the nourishing of my years.

登江中孤嶼

江南倦歷覽，江北曠周旋。
懷新道轉迴，尋異景不延。
亂流趨正色，孤嶼媚中川。
雲日相暉映，空水共澄鮮。
表靈物莫賞，蘊真誰為傳。
想像崑山姿，緬邈區中緣。
始信安期術，得盡養身年。

The ability of Xie Lingyun to create outstanding parallelism was praised by poets and critics even centuries later: “K’ang-lo (Xie Lingyun) had a prodigious skill in the artful composition of parallelism, with no sense of the tediousness.”⁷ Indeed, it was through parallelism that Xie Lingyun most effectively presented his view of nature.

In the poem above, the first four couplets display a parallelism by describing the landscapes, like river north and river south, wild current and the isolated river, cloud and

⁶ An Qi technique (安期術) means the way can make people to be immortal.

⁷ *Landscape Transformation in the Poetry of Xie Lingyun*, Journal of the American, Oriental Society 237-254. In the history, poet Xie Lingyun was the model of good at using the parallelism in the poems, and it is also one feature of his language structure.

sun, sky and water. By creating these parallel couplets, Xie Lingyun succeeds in conveying the inherent symmetry of nature. This artistic achievement was only made possible through his detailed attention paid and the feeling of symmetry.

Not only did Xie Lingyun build parallelism into his description of landscape, which was the most famous part of his poetry, but he also followed this pattern in expressions of his religious belief. In the last three couplets of the poem above, he still kept this parallelism when poet shifted his description to the religious thoughts, like the manifest spirit and the hidden truth, the immortal living and the nourishing year. He always followed this writing pattern strictly to build up his landscape perspective in the poems.

In addition, Xie Lingyun didn't just depict the nature in the poem, but also incorporated his own response to his environment, an effect which the traditional critics in later time summarized as "the fusion of emotion and scene," and in Chinese we call it "融情於景."

Talking about the "naturalness" in Xie Lingyun's poems, one will inevitably mention another poet--Tao Yuanming (陶淵明), who valued the "evenness" (平淡) and "naturalness" (自然) in his writings, and was a model of such in history. Zhong Rong (鍾嶸 c.468-c.518), a famous literary critic in the Southern dynasty, gave high evaluation to Tao Yuanming's writings. In his book *Shi-Pin* (詩品), Zhong Rong critiqued on the most important authors from the Han period down to his own times, and described Tao Yuanming's poetry in this way:

His language and verse are simple and clean, almost without unnecessary words. The emotion is sincere, honest and unsophisticated, and the poems' images are graceful and proper. Every time I read his writings, I think about the person's virtue. People in the world praise his simplicity and naturalness, with lines such as "With joyful words I get drunk on spring wine" and "At sunset there are no clouds in the sky". His writing is elegant and exquisite. Could this be the language of a rustic farmer? He is the ancestor of all the ancient and modern recluse poet.

文體省淨，殆無長語。篤意真古，詞興婉愜。每觀其文，想其人德。世嘆其質直。至如“歡言醉⁸春酒”，“日暮天無雲”。風華清靡，豈直為田家語耶！古今隱逸詩人之宗也。

According to the evaluation above, Zhong Rong highly appreciated the simplicity (質樸) and naturalness (自然) in Tao Yuanming's poetry, "his writing feature is elegant and exquisite (風華清靡)." Even though Tao emphasized the naturalness in his language, but his naturalness was originally born with elegance. The Drinking Poem is a good example of Tao's unsophisticated emotion in his writings.

Drinking Poem (the first one)

I build my house at people realm,
Yet hear no sound from cart and horse.
You ask me how could it be?
When the heart wanders far, the place itself is absent.
I pick chrysanthemum under the eastern hedge,
Leisurely look toward South Mountain.
The mountain mist at morning and dusk become beautiful,
Flying birds accompanying with me go back.

⁸ According to Xu Da in book *Shi-Pin Quan Jie* (詩品全解), he mentioned "Zui" (醉) here worked as "Zhuo" (酌).

These things contain a true meaning,
I desire to describe, but I have forgotten the words.

飲酒詩二十首（其一）
結廬在人境，而無車馬喧。
問君何能爾，心遠地自偏。
采菊東籬下，悠然見南山。
山氣日夕佳，飛鳥相與還。
此中有真意，欲辨已忘言。

Since Tao Yuanming brought up “naturalness” as a new aesthetic element during his time, a number of six dynasty writers employed it as well. Xie Lingyun (謝靈運) was one example. According to Wendy Swartz’s book *Reading Tao Yuanming*, “Tao Yuanming rightfully becomes the epitome of poetic naturalness, and Xie Lingyun turned into his antithesis.”⁹

Not only did he affect Six dynasty, Tao Yuanming also had a big influence on the Tang dynasty. Wendy Swartz said:

It is clear from the many hundreds of poems in *Quan Tang Shi* (全唐詩) with references to Tao Yuanming that Tang poets were most drawn to depictions of Tao’s life as a recluse. The amount of attention paid to Tao’s works and his biographies is characteristic of Tang poets vivid and colorful scenes from his life in retirement. And their interpretations reveal the great influence of the biographies of Tao’s life.¹⁰

⁹ Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 13. Tao Yuanming was the Chinese poet who once lived in Six dynasties, he was famous by his recluse poems, and had big influence in Tang dynasty, Swartz believed that lots of poets were affected by Tao, for example, Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi...in my opinion, Han Shan has the same recluse thoughts with Tao Yuanming.

¹⁰ Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 49

With the “recluse style” influence of Tao Yuanming, Han Shan wrote about his recluse persona through the explicit arguments:

For what reason I am always disappointed and sad?
Man’s life is like the morning mushroom.¹¹
How can one bear it for ten years,
Kin and friends decline and vanish.
Thinking of this makes me sad,
The melancholy mood I cannot bear.
O what to do? O what to do?
Abandon whole body and get back to mountain refuge.

何以長惆悵，人生似朝菌。
那堪數十年，親舊凋落盡。
以此思自哀，哀情不可忍。
奈何當奈何，托體歸山隱。

In the first couplet this poem, the poet directly began his conversation with a discussion on “Short Life.” Then, in the middle two couplets, he expressed his grief by mentioning the increasingly frequent deaths of his friends and kin. This feeling he had was something he could not stand, and it was no longer a problem waiting for solution but an emotional crisis. The poem ends in line 7 with a sigh, “奈何當奈何。奈何” was always used to express emotional perplexity in the face of a dilemma, and this vernacular phrase was used here for two duties: on the one hand, it expressed poet’s lament for his kin and friends’ deaths in a very oral tone; on the other hand, it also implied his desperate failure to find a solution. The last line then becomes a release from the suffering

¹¹ The little mushroom that springs up in the morning and shrivels away before the night. (*Zhuang Zi*, Xiao Yao You Chapter)

represented in the first seven lines.

The language in this poem made it close to a preaching poem, it used a chain of emotional cause and effect to bring about the liberation that came from the Buddhist thinking, like the last line was a release from the suffering represented in the first seven lines. The situation appeared in the writing was a common one that may someday come to everyone. The vernacular phrases in the sentence, like “奈何,” “哪堪,” made Han Shan’s literature close to people’s oral expressions at that time. Thus, when readers read this poem, they may easily find themselves in the narration. Paul Rouzer in *On Cold Mountain* believed that: “The Han Shan’s corpus introduces a religious aspect to such universalism, which defines it as a genre distinct from other popular verse.”¹²

As for the 303 of Han Shan’s poems that exist nowadays, most of them symbolize the spiritual quest for enlightenment and the difficulties and obstacles that one would encounter in his or her life. These symbols Han Shan employed for writings showed his belief in Karma and preference for enlightenment, and proved that he was Buddhist. In many poems, Han Shan’s writings persuaded the common people to get rid of the suffering in the profane world and taught them how to reach enlightenment, making him more of an instructor than just a mere speaker. This is in contrast with most of the other

12 Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 73-74. The “universalism” here explains that the persona and voice in Han Shan’s poems are not embodied by a specific person, it can be embodied by anyone in different situation of readers, just like the Buddhist sutra can be understood in different meaning.

Buddhist poets at the same age, who preferred to express their desire of chasing the enlightenment for themselves. This desire of the other poets was observed by Stephen Owen: some time ago traditional Chinese reading practices chose to make the inscription of self and personality in the text the central goal in writing and reading poetry, and that any reader who does not take that goal into consideration will not understand much of what Chinese poetry is attempting to do.¹³ Here, for example, is a famous regulated-verse poem named Climbing the Differentiating Perception Temple, by Wang Wei (王維¹⁴ c.699-c.761), a poet with a strong Buddhist sympathy who was also admired for his skill in writing the Buddhist poetry:

Ascending Differentiating Perception Temple

A bamboo path leads from the place where I start;
In the lotus peaks appear the magic city.
I look out the side window and see the whole Chu place;
From the forest I can see nine rivers, flat and peaceful.
The soft grasses bear the weight of cross sitting;
The long pines echo the sound of chanting.
Residing in emptiness beyond the dharma clouds;
Observing the world attains the Non-Birth.

登辨覺寺

竹徑從初地，蓮峰出化城。
窗中三楚盡，林上九江平。
軟草承趺坐，長松響梵聲。
空居法雲外，觀世得無生。

13 Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 36.

14 Wang Wei chose his courtesy name as Mojie (字摩詰), and he often signed his works Wang Weimojie, because Wei-Mo-Jie (維摩詰) is the Chinese name for *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, and Wang Wei was one of believer of Buddhism.

Stephen Owen, has identified a standard structure for the regular Chinese poetry: the opening couplets of Chinese poems always represent the scene, clarifying the space or the time; the closing couplet often give an emotional response to the situation; and the two middle couplets, usually syntactically parallel and descriptive, elaborate on the scene and the poet's reaction to it.¹⁵ In this poem, Wang Wei exploited this structure in a particularly Buddhist way: the first couplet, Wang Wei gives the location a peaceful and mysterious description; then after presenting the senses outside, Wang Wei practices his Buddhist action to respond to this environment; In the end, the poet makes the essential realization that Buddhism could cure the brevity of human life. The poem ends with the word Non-Birth, which refers to the Buddhist belief that impermanence can only be removed through attaining nirvana, and thus ending not simply death but also the rebirth.

However, when looking at Han Shan's poems, he abandons the building of artistic feeling in his expression, and just gives his arguments in an explicit way, such as the following example:

As for the evil realms, they are boundless and unlimited;
Dim and dark, there is no sun light.
In men's world, eight hundred years¹⁶
Still cannot compare in length to living in here half a night.
As for these who are all the fools;
To discuss their situation can make me terribly painful.

¹⁵ Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 71. It is an interesting summary given by Owen in his book *Poetry of the Early Tang*.

¹⁶ Probably it is allusion to Peng Zu: he is said to have lived eight hundred years.

I urge you, sir, to seek release,
To recognize and attain the Dharma-king.¹⁷

惡趣甚茫茫，冥冥無日光。
人間八百歲，未抵半宵長。
此等諸痴子，論情甚可傷。
勸君求出離¹⁸，認取法中王。

This poem possessed juxtaposition of the profane world with the sacred world. The first couplet depicts human life as always filled with delusion that come from evil interests. In the middle couplets, there is a comparison between “eight hundred years” and “half night,” which directly illustrates the worthlessness of human’s world, because most human beings living in the profane world are fools. The last line then illuminates a solution for this dim and dark life; “urge you” here can make readers intimately feel the persuasive voice of Han Shan.

From the comparison between these two poems, the function of Han Shan’s writing was quite different from those of Wang Wei’s. Wang Wei, like most elite Chinese poets at the same time, often made a claim to represent their mental feeling at a point in time. Han Shan’s poetry, by contrast, is an illustration of a state of mind characteristic to all of us. We can see ourselves in his narrative voice, and his urgent persuasion compels readers to take action.

¹⁷ Dharma, here refers to the ten thousand things or the lord of the ten thousand things, which is the heart. Thus the Dharma-king here means the Buddha, this sentence means to know about and hold on to the Buddha inside.

¹⁸ In the Buddhist thinking, *chu li* (出離) means release from attachments.

In this comparison, it is not hard to see that the Buddhism is expressed in two different ways. Han Shan's poetry is expressed as "Dharma King" for the common people, that with help of Buddhism, could save them from this dim and dark world. There was even an urgency that hoped people could take it, because it would definitely be very helpful. Wang Wei, rather than giving the direct argument with the vernacular expression through the comparison between the profane world and sacred world, first builds up the "Zen style" by displaying the nature with the religious word, for example, *hua-cheng* (化城), referred to the Mahayana enlightenment coming from *The Lotus Sutra*; *fan-sheng* (梵聲), mostly signified the Buddhist chanting in the temple; and *guan-shi* (觀世), although it was translated as observing the world, this word also had the meaning referring to Avalokiteshvara, thus there was possible it meant bodhisattvas in the deep way. In Wang Wei's poems, Buddhist thought was expressed as the poet's own enlightenment. He describes his personal practices in Buddhism, but his writings did not have a strong persuasion over his readers. It was not the same as the sutra way, which directly preaches and instructs the common people, as Han Shan did in his writings.

As for the reason why Han Shan's poetry language had such a down-to-earth features, it is reasonable to assume that Han Shan may have been affected by the development of vernacular verses in the Tang dynasty. When talking about Tang Poetry,

most critics and researchers focus their attention on the “Modern Style”¹⁹ (近體詩) and “Poems of Song Form” (歌行體), so much so that the vernacular verses seemed to have been marginalized. Since Hu Shi (胡適) published his *A History of Vernacular Literature*, and Zheng Zhenduo, who was a journalist, writer, archaeologist and scholar in the modern China, published his *History of Chinese Popular Literature*, people have begun to share their attention on vernacular verses in history. In fact, vernacular literature had a great development in Tang dynasty. According to author Chu Xiang, he in his book *The Vernacular Poetry Research in Tang Dynasty* that:

In the Tang dynasty, most of the Zen’s collections have the poetic gathas, and these poetic gathas mainly depict the Buddhist master’s religious practices and stories in the living, and externalize their thinking and enlightenment coming from their inner mind. Then they manifest their joy and peace, because of Buddhism through the lively vernacular language in the gathas.²⁰

We can also find this type of poetic gathas from *The Record of Linji* (臨濟錄) in Tang dynasty:

Someone asked, “What about the state where ‘mind and mind do not differ’?”
The master said: “The instant you ask the question they are already separate, and essence differs from its manifestations.”

¹⁹ Modern style, referring to innovations in classical poetry during Tang dynasty (618-907), marked by strict tonal patterns and rhyme schemes.

²⁰ Xiang Chu, *The Annotation of Han Shan Poetry*, 23. Gatha is used in Sankrit term for “song” or “verse,” and in the gatha, it mainly teaches people through the stories or practices of Buddhist Masters.

“Followers of the Way, make no mistake! All the dharmas of this world and of the world beyond are without self-nature. Also, they are without produced nature. They are just empty names and these names are also empty. All you are doing is taking these worthless names to be real. That’s all wrong! Even if they do exist, they are nothing but states of dependent transformation, such as the dependent transformations of bodhi, nirvana, emancipation, the threefold body, bodhisattvahood, and buddhahood. What are you looking for in these lands of dependent transformations! All of these, up to and including the Three Vehicles’ twelve divisions of teachings, are just so much waste paper to wipe off privy filth. The Buddha is just a phantom body, the patriarchs just old monks.”

“But you, weren’t you born of a mother? If you seek the Buddha, you’ll be held in the grip of Buddha-Māra. If you seek the patriarchs, then you’ll be bound by the ropes of Patriarch-Māra. If you engage in any seeking, it will all be pain. Much better to do nothing.”²¹

Compared with the Buddhist sutras from previous eras, such as Heart Sutra, the language in *The Record of Linji* is much more simple and clear, while still embodying the Buddhist philosophy. In accordance with the above analyses of Han Shan’s language feature above, his vernacular language feature is very similar to the expression in *The Record of Linji*. In this way, it is reasonable to say that “Han Shan Style” was affected by the development of vernacular verses in the Tang Dynasty.

Moreover, in regards to poetic expression, many of poets of the Tang Dynasty

²¹ *The Record of Linji*, translated by Ruth Fuller Sasaki. This book mainly collected the dialogue between master Lin Ji and his followers, the language is very vernacular and related to the daily life, and this feature also appears in Han Shan’s writing.

focused on taking advantage of classical allusion in their writings, due to the fact that various allusions were the standards to manifest the accumulation for reading books and the high level for education, while in this way it may have brought about the problems to the readers who did not know about this allusion in the history to understand the poetry. Just like the poem coming from Xie Lingyun (謝靈運), written at age of forty-eight on the eve of his execution:

Poem of Approaching Death

Gong Sheng²² had no life remaining,
Li Ye²³ had his final end.
Ji Gong²⁴ principles were harried;
Huo Zi²⁵ life, as well, was lost.
Withered, withered the frost-bitten leaves;
Tangled, tangled the wind-blown mold.
Whenever it may be at last, this encounter;
Whether late or soon, it not what troubles me.
I only regret my gentlemanly resolve;
Has not found surcease on the mountains.²⁶
To deliver up my heart before I have achieved
self-awareness;
This pain I have tolerated for long.
I only hope to take the next generation,

²² In *Han Shu*, after Wang Mang's lord died, he was summoned to the court, but refusing the food, then after fourteen days died.

²³ In *Hou Han Shu*, a contemporary of Wang Many who lived in retirement during that regime, called later into service by the other usurper, then he declined, and he was given the poisonous wine with which committed suicide.

²⁴ Implicated for friend's disagreement.

²⁵ Hu also died because refused to serve the would-be usurper.

²⁶ This translation comes from *The Landscape Buddhism of Fifth-century Poet Hsieh Ling-yun*, written by Richard Mather.

The complaining kin have the same mind with emperor.

臨終詩

龔勝無餘生，李業有終盡。
嵇公理既迫，霍子命亦殞。
淒淒陵霜柏，納納衝風菌。
邂逅竟幾時，修短非所憫。
恨我君子志，不獲岩上泯。
送心正覺前，斯痛久已忍。
唯願乘來生，怨親同心朕。

Xie Lingyun's poem illustrates his preference for using allusions in his writings at that period of time. In order to fully understand these meaning of the poems, readers should have a strong grasp of the readings, otherwise they may not understand the poets message. While "Han Shan's Style" contrasted to this allegoric and abstruse style, the expression in Han Shan's poems was very earthy, and vernacular, even though the poems conveyed lots of thinking for religion or the philosophy, the meaning of his poems were very easy to understand. Han Shan also utilized a few allegories in his writings, but they were not beyond the range of *Wen Xuan* (文選). Zhang Shouyue (張守月) who was a Song dynasty governor and Han Shan expert who evaluated Han Shan in this way: "Han Shan's poems are not the poems in the orthodox way, he did not mean to write the poems as the poems, this kind of style become the 'Han Shan Style'." Han Shan himself also in his poem expressed the preference for this simple language style:

Some people laugh at my poems;
But my poems match to the elegant and refined.

I do not bother Zheng to give the notes;
Why should I use the Master Mao's explanation.²⁷
I do not resent that understanding people are few;
It's just that soul mates are quite rare.
If you dispel my poems with the musical tones;
My defects, will never come to an end.
Suddenly my poems meet with someone with the sharp
eyes;
Then they will naturally become popular in the world.

有人笑我詩，我詩合典雅。
不煩鄭氏箋，豈用毛公解。
不恨會人稀，只為知音²⁸寡。
若遣趁宮商²⁹，余病莫能罷。
忽遇明眼人，即自流天下。

In this poem, Han Shan explicitly compared his work to the *Book of the Song* (詩經), and even suggested his own works were superior to it, in that it was canonical in content and also easily understood. His writings were free from the commentarial burden, so that he weighed down the earlier classic. Because of his preference for simple language, Han Shan did not attempt to embellish his writing, which to some degree was close to the style of *The Book of Songs* (詩經) that was natural and clear. Thus it was very easy for people to understand the meaning of his expression, and his persuasive language gave an easier way for people to understand the Buddhism.

²⁷ The two earliest commentaries on *Book of Songs* (詩經) are Mao Shi, written by Mao Heng (毛亨) and Mao Chang (毛萇) (C. 130 B.C) and Zheng Jian (supplementary commentary) written by Zheng Xuan (鄭玄).

²⁸ *Zhi-yin* (知音) originates the story of Yu Boya (于伯牙) and Zhong Ziqi (鐘子期). If Boya was thinking of a mountain when he played his lute, Ziqi knew it, and if he had his mind on a river, Ziqi knew that as well.

²⁹ *Gong* (宮) and *shang* (商) are the first two musical tones in the Chinese pentatonic scale.

CHAPTER 4

READING HAN SHAN IN BUDDHISM

As mentioned above, Stephen Owen observed that traditional Chinese reading practices chose to make the inscription of self and personality in the text as the central goal in writing and reading poetry. In this way, this goal made readers obtain an inclination that reconstructed a biography via the poems. In the same way, it cannot escape anyone reviewing Han Shan in the past few decades that a substantial portion of his works attempts to reconstruct a biography for him, and this represents a combination of traditional reading methods with modern inclination.

Mainstream poets in Tang dynasty, such as Du Fu (杜甫 c.712-c.770), Wang Wei (王维 c.701-c.761), and Li Bai (李白 c.701-c.762) wrote poems that were very much rooted in the expression of self –type of autobiography. In previous time, particularly at the beginning of the Qing dynasty, scholars exerted great intellectual effort in identifying the precise circumstances that produced each poem and arranging them in a chronological sequence. Even biographical reconstruction continues to this day in much of Chinese scholarly writing on mainstream Chinese poetry. These efforts have many potential reasons, but one popular belief in Chinese culture continues to be taken: If one can reconstruct the events behind every poem, one will have a guide to the poet's emotions

and will thus understand him better as a human being,³⁰ which means “*zhi yin*” in literary.

Of course, it cannot be denied that this biographical reading method brought great contribution to historical and literary studies; however, it also created some limitations for the readers. The literary critics W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley mention in their paper *Intentional Fallacy* mentioned that:

Since poetry is not the critic's own and not the author's, poetry belongs to the public. Poetry is embodied in language, and it is about the human being, the object of public knowledge. Therefore, every critic who treats the intention coming from the poet as the method to understand the poem is not the proper way, and they are just going to the wrong direction.³¹

W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley maintain that critics ought to examine the relationship between what the writings said and the way it expressed. In the other words, critics must become scientists of the literature, and they should analyze with imagery, persona, narrative structure, point of view, and other techniques in the writings. Critics should appreciate these areas of the self-contained works, because W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley insist that the meaning of a text was intrinsic and should neither be confused with the author's intentions nor the work's affective dimension.

³⁰ Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 45.

³¹ W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1946), 468-488. Because reading the book with the intention is similar to reading in biographic way, thus I use this criticism here to talk the limitation brought by this reading approach.

Besides this limitation believed by these two critics, there are other reasons why the biographic method would not have shifted to Han Shan interpretation. When readers actually look at Han Shan's poems talking with first person "I," they may run into a new series of problems: Who is he really? Was Han Shan a poor, suffering peasant? Was he a bravo who lived in the capital, indulging in hunting in the plains? Or was he a well-educated son come from a wealthy family? All of potential roles are the conventional fictional personae in early Chinese popular poetry, and they all make a persona in Han Shan's poem with the first person pronouns. Here are some examples from Han Shan's poems:

I recall the days of my youth--
I always went hunting towards Ping Ling.
To be a national minister is not my desire,
Being immortal is not enough to satisfy.
On and on, I ride my white horse,
Shout out the hares, release the green hawks.
I do not notice the great suffering.
As for my old face, who will take pity on me?

尋思少年日，遊獵向平陵。
國使職非願，神仙未足稱。
聯翩騎白馬，喝兔放蒼鷹。
不覺大流落，皤皤誰見矜。

In this poem, the persona mainly recalls the freedom of his youth. Compelled by the traditional reading habit, some readers might take this further and see this as an autobiographical poem. If so it is inevitable that readers will believe that Han Shan was a

wealthy youth, and never cared about fame and the future. In other poems, Han Shan describes his early years spent in a poor farmer family:

When I was young, I'd bring the the classics alone when I
hoed,³²
Originally I planned to live together with my elder brother.
Because I got the blame from the other generation,
Even more, I was alienated by my wife.
I abandoned and separated from red dust realm,
I constantly roam about with my favorite books.
Who can lend me a dipper of water,
To retrieve the fish in the track?³³

少小帶經鋤，本將兄共居。
緣遭他輩責，剩被自妻疏。
拋絕紅塵境，常游好閱書。
誰能借斗水，活取轍中魚。

Comparing these two poems, reading Han Shan in biographical way does not answer the question about his identity, but actually brings more confusion about his experiences before going to Cold Mountain. These kinds of problem can also be encountered when reading other his other poems. Obviously, this type of biographical reading method is doubtful, even though it might be “*zhi yin*”(知音) for reading mainstream poetry.

More and more modern scholars bring up new approaches in reading the poetry. For

³² Here Han Shan may allude one story coming from *Han Shu* (漢書), Zhu Maiqian who was the woodcutter, he always carried his classics with him when he went to cut wood. His wife got tired of his lack of success and then left him, when in the end Zhu Maiqian became an official and his wife wanted to be taken back.

³³ An allusion to the fish in the track, who asked the philosopher Zhuang Zi for a dipperful of water so that he could go on living. (*Zhuang Zi*, Wai wu Chapter)

example, when David K. Schneider discussed about how to read Du Fu's poetry (杜甫诗), his focus did not just emphasize the author of the poem, but rather Du as the implied narrator or poetic persona. In his book, *Confucian Prophet*, Schneider states:

This consideration open new views into how political thought might be seen more clearly in Du's poetry when read as a literary and philosophical construct in dialogue with the literary and philosophical tradition, rather than as a record of direct experience.³⁴

The next question for every reader, then, is what approach should one apply to Han Shan's poetry? Before figuring out this question, one first must clearly understand what poetry is?

In the preface to *The Book of Poetry*, which is the first ever poetry collection in Chinese, it states: "Poetry is where the heart's wishes go. What lies in the hearts is 'wish,' when expressed in words, it is 'poetry'."³⁵ And according to author James. J. Y. Liu. In book *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, he believed even though different group had their own definition for poetry, but there was one thing similar: Poetry come from inside, and affect inside, transform inside. Moreover, James J. Y. Liu maintained that:

While recognizing that poetry is a form of self-expression, tend to commit an error similar to that of the Moralists,³⁶

³⁴ *Confucian Prophet*, Chapter 1. By this approach, the author mainly wants to concentrate on the relationship between Du Fu's language and his political thoughts, in this way, it can restore literary and philosophical tradition on just poet's writings.

³⁵ J J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 64.

³⁶ According to James, he believed that where the Moralists go wrong is to apply non-artistic standards to

by identifying the impulse to write poetry with poetry itself. And the conception of poetry is too narrow, being confined to an expression of emotion and personality only. This leaves no room for purely intellectual reflections and the poet's response to the external world.³⁷

In order to avoid narrowing down the meaning of poetry, Liu preferred to pay the attention to the “world” in the poetry, according for him, this “world” was a reflection of the poet's external environment and an expression of his total consciousness. Each poem embodied a world of its own, be it great or small, remote or familiar, but as long as the poetry was genuine, it would transport us into its special world, to enable us to see certain things, to feel certain emotions, to ponder on certain aspects of life, to experience in our imagination a state of being which we may or may not have experienced in real life.³⁸

Since James J. Y. Liu more focused on the “world” in the poems, he preferred to take the persona in the poems as the view of poet rather than taking just the poet as the persona, and to explore the “world” in authors' writings, Liu believed readers should ask themselves two questions: the first one, “Does this poem explore a world of its own, and if so, what kind of world is it?” the second one, “Does it break new grounds in the use of language?” And Liu in his book utilized the Shakespeare as example: “Few of us have had the misfortune to have had our father murdered by our uncle, or to have committed

works of art.

³⁷ J J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 93-94.

³⁸ J J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 98. The world in one poem contains both the external and internal environments viewed by the poet, thus the world is the ground for the poem.

regicide, but Shakespeare makes us feel what it is like to be tormented by the dilemma between intellectual doubts and the desire for revenge, or be haunted by the remorse and fear of a murderer.”³⁹ Thus according to Liu, he believed writers were ought to make their readers experience the worlds that were unfamiliar to them, or should make the readers experience the old worlds in one new way.

Besides the “world” in the poetry, there are still another various worlds existing around, and everyone can be the creator for his own world, just like, the painter creates his world by painting; and sculptor by sculpture. We can observe an artful world which belongs to the artist himself. As for every story written in the novels, the writer also constructs one literature world by his imagination. These worlds can be joyful, can be colorful, can be sorrowful, can be black and white, these world also can be everything just depending on the creation from this designer.

When Mircea Eliade explored the religious world, there were two aspects found by him. For one thing that there was the comparison between the profane world and sacred world; for other thing, since the sacred world contrasted to the profane world where men lived, the language was limited by the people’s experience, thus when people depicted the sacred world, the expression was always indirectly by the symbolizing words coming from the profane world. Mircea Eliade in *Religion as Response to the Sacred* expressed

³⁹ J J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 99.

his finding that the religious ideas and behaviors as much an agent in shaping society as society was in shaping religion, which seems similar to Peter L. Berger's talking that man was the product of the society, meanwhile society was also the product of man. In contrast with Berger's idea that religion was the product of societal development, which attached itself to this society, Mircea defined the sacred as a sphere not of society but of the supernatural because he believed the realm relating religion beyond earthly life was filled with the changeless, perfection, order, power and beauty. This world was in contrast with the profane world, which was not personal but entirely changeable and chaotic. This profane world was constructed by ordinary human life, and stained by the struggle and suffering pressed by a life and bordered by death. Moreover, Mircea had his own thinking of expressing this sacred world: "Because the realm of the sacred it so utterly unlike that of the profane world, it can only be described indirectly, through the suggestive effect of images and symbols. They are the language of religion."⁴⁰

No matter expresses the old worlds in one new way or the unfamiliar world in an indirect way, like expressing religious world, James J. Y. Liu believed this undiscovered way can be expressed through the language in poetry, which included: the new combinations of sense and sound, the new expression, the new patterns of words, the

⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Religion as Response to the Sacred*, 275. According to Eliade, the sacred world can not just easily summarize as contrasting the profane world, because this is a totally different world that the language from human beings cannot describe this world.

images, associations, etc. And Liu regarded Shakespeare and Du Fu as supreme poets. According to him, these two poets “not only explores more widely and deeply into worlds of human experience but extends the territory of that language more than any other poet.”⁴¹

The poet Han Shan achieved two goals in his writings. He built a new sacred world which contrasted with the profane world, and depicted the familiar human world in a new way by his special expression. From a non-biographical perspective, readers could easily find his Buddhist marks in the poems, for example existence and impermanence, which are both central tenants to the faith. In this way, is there any possibility that readers have a justification for imagining that Han Shan poems are encouraging a Buddhist reading?

In fact, there are many of poems in Han Shan’s collection which employ a didactic voice and ask readers take on a certain Buddhist frame of their mind, and here is one example:

Everyone, who reads my poems,
In mind, they should defend their purity.
The stingy and rapacious people, daily will improve,
Flattering and crankiness will be correct right away.
To wipe out the evil karma,
To enter the path of Buddha, accept the true nature.
Today you will obtain the Buddhist body,
You should act as quickly as if by imperial command.

⁴¹ James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 100.

凡讀我詩者，心中須護淨。
慳貪繼日廉，諂曲登時正。
驅遣除惡業，歸依受真性。
今日得佛身，急急如律令⁴²。

This poem contains a lot of Buddhist terminology, such as “evil karma,” “Buddha Body,” “path of Buddha,” “keep purity in mind,” “the true nature.” And according to Paul Rouzer, in his book *On the Cold Mountain* he believed that all of these terms have a rich history of usage in the sutra literature. As for Buddhist readers, they will be familiar with these terms, for example, the stinginess is the opposite of generosity, and it can generate the “evil karma” in the fifth line, and the practice of “preserve purity of mind” is the path leading to the “Buddha Body.” The rough translation of “purity of mind,” “Buddha Body” and “true nature” would be familiar by anyone reading Buddhism texts like *Lotus Sutra*, *Vimalakīrti Sutra*. In this way, the poem is not an obscure one, and the Buddhist resonance is easy to hear. This does not happen in these poems but in many of the poems in Han Shan’s collection.

Besides the Buddhist thinking is imparted and taught in Han Shan’s writing, his mode of expression is also similar to the Buddhist texts at that time.

Stephen Bokenkamp, who was a researcher of International cultures, wrote about Chinese ideas of figurative language. He noted that translators of Sanskrit texts used the term “biyu” (the word now used to mean metaphor) to render a number of types of

⁴² *Ly-ling* (律令), was an order or command that was written down as a law.

figurative language in the South Asian metaphor, allegory, and parable.⁴³ In the book *On the Cold Mountain*, Paul Rouzer mentioned the Tiantai temple founder Zhiyi (智顗, c537-c598) considered “*biyu*” (譬喻) in this way: *biyu* is a means of dissolving delusion and is the best way of helping others to apprehend the meaning of 空: It is like illusion, like flame, like the reflection of the moon in the water, like the empty void, like an echo, etc.⁴⁴

“*Biyu*” also emerged in the *Lotus Sutra*, especially in the context of evaluating what was truth and what was non-truth. In those chapters, the Buddha explained that he might use figurative language while preaching what was only “conventionally” true for certain truths inside of specific situations, but was not “ultimately true from a perspective outside samsara.” The most famous source for the idea of using figurative language could be directly found in the lotus sutra:

At that time the Buddha spoke to Sariputra: “Did I not say before: ‘The various Buddhas, the World-Honored One preaches the Dharma through various causes and conditions and through skillful means by use of figurative language (*biyu*), all for the sake of ultimate enlightenment?’ All of this preaching is for the sake of converting bodhisattvas. And therefore, Sariputra! I shall now clarify this meaning further through the use of a figure (*biyu*), so that all those who possess wisdom may be able to understand through

⁴³ Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 57.

⁴⁴ Paul Rouzer, *On Cold Mountain--A Buddhist Reading of the Hanshan Poems*, 58. “*biyu*” here means 譬喻, 方便 in Chinese, means parable or metaphor in English. 空 is the good example of “*biyu*” explained in Buddhist way.

use of a figure (*biyu*).”⁴⁵

Here the Buddha’s speaking tells us that teaching through the use of figurative language (*biyu*), would be understood by those who possess wisdom. And in the context, figurative language may be said to be not true in an absolute sense, though it is true contextually. If one thinks the poems in the Han Shan’s collection as examples of *biyu* in a Buddhist context, one can imagine a way for reading the poems in Buddhist rhetoric that would free them from a conventional biographical reading, from the assumption that their narratives are supposed to reflect the actual experience of a human being known as Han Shan; rather, as *biyu* texts, they open the back door to fictionality, and Buddhist narrative literature which often incorporate a wide body of folk material and subordinates it to the context of karma and rebirth. Han Shan’s collection largely reflected Chinese society, and these different identities in his writings reflect not just many different individuals, but also the countless states of being that people have experienced in the past and might experienced again in the future. In this way, these writings of Han Shan are the reader’s their own personal experience, and Han Shan presented them to every reader for their own edification, just as the Buddha did.

This way of reading brought people back to the claim that Han Shan is an incarnation of Mañjuśrī. This was not simply a figure of description, but was meant to

⁴⁵ Burton Watson, *The lotus Sutra*, 167.

point to the wisdom in Han Shan's writings. Thus, it is reasonable to read Han Shan as a collection of Buddhist poems in which readers can take the role of "zhiyin" who can understand the wisdom among the lines in a different way. Han Shan's writings like the description for Buddha in *Vimalakīrti sūtra*:

Each sees the World-Honored One appear;
This through this supernatural power, his distinctive
characteristics.
The Buddha with a single sound preaches the Dharma,
While each sentient being understands in accordance with
its kind.
Each believes the World-Honored One is speaking to it,
This through his supernatural power, his distinctive
characteristics.
The Buddha with a single sound preaches the Dharma,
And each sentient being follows in accordance with its
understanding.⁴⁶

The main idea portrayed in this sūtra is that through the wisdom of a Buddha or a bodhisattva, a listener is empowered to obtain whatever was most significant to her or him at that specific moment. Back to Han Shan's corpus, when reading his poems, his writing does not enable us to understand him as one specific person; rather, readers should recognize Han Shan as a preacher.

All of these texts, both in the sūtras and in Han Shan's writings, suggest a

⁴⁶ Burton Waston, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, 76-77. Burton gave the translation for this sūtra. This chapter in *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* mainly represents "reader-response" aspect, the Buddha's words do not enable us to understand him as a specific person; rather, readers are able to perceive the Buddha's wisdom is a fluctuating phenomenon without specific identity, which is also represented in Han Shan's writings.

perspective that celebrates its freedom to explore and discover a way of expressing the Dharma, as well as a way to embracing the interpretive strategies of the readers. Thus, when readers use a Buddhist, rather than a biographic reading, it can help transcend one's self and recognize individual identity with all sentient beings which would, in turn, aid in widening their perspective in order to find enlightenment through reading.

CHAPTER 5

A BUDDHIST DEPICTION IN HAN SHAN'S LITERARY-RELIGIOUS WORLD

What emotions are often presented in Han Shan's poems? Readers may very well choose "anger" and "frustration." Han Shan implied many times these emotions were responsible for suffering in the world. In turn, one must ask: what is suffering in the profane world from a secular point of view? Since chapter 3 mentioned that a Buddhist reading is a helpful method to analyze Han Shan's writings, a definition of suffering in a Buddhist context is required.

5.1 Depicting Suffering in the Profane World

In *The Four Noble Truths*, it pertains to dukkha, it is interpreted to mean that life explained in the Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain. The writer in *What the Buddha Taught*, was not satisfied with this limited translation. He believed, in ordinary usage, dukkha meant suffering as opposed to the word sukha, meaning happiness. He also claimed it had a deeper philosophical meaning and connoted enormously wider sense, such as imperfection, emptiness. The writer could have possibility not denied understanding dukkha as suffering, but he wanted to make people avoid being misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic. Specifically speaking, the Buddha does not deny happiness in life when he says there is suffering. On the contrary, he admits different

forms of happiness both material and spiritual, the happiness of the life of a recluse, the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment...⁴⁷ But, all these were included in dukkha, because everything in the common world is not perpetual, everything is in the circle of change, and change give rise to suffering.

5.1.1 Poverty is Suffering

According to *The Four Noble Truths*, it is believed association with unpleasant conditions was dukkha.

Han Shan depicted poverty as suffering because living in sickness and such poor conditions made his friends and relatives leave him.

Oh heaven, I am poor and sick,
I'm a man cut off from both friends and kin.
The earthen jar constantly has no grain,
The rice steamer often is covered with ash.
My thatched hut cannot keep out the rain,
My shabby couch can hardly hold me.
Do not complain now you are so haggard and worn;
Many worries must wear out people.

吁嗟貧復病，為人絕友親。
甕里長無飯，甌中屢生塵。
蓬庵不免雨，漏榻劣容身。
莫怪今憔悴，多愁定損人。

⁴⁷ *What The Buddha Taught*, 16.

Mr. poor living in a world with vast knowledge while his life drifts around like the rootless weeds.

A man with a good head and belly;⁴⁸
Six arts⁴⁹ all are well known by him.
When seen in the South, he was driven to the North;
When encountered in the West, he was chased back to
the East.
Always drifting, like the floating duckweed;⁵⁰
Never resting, like the blown tumbleweed.
You ask this is what sort?
His surname is Poverty and name is called Emptiness.

一人好頭肚，六藝盡皆通。
南見趁向北，西見趁向東。
長漂如浮萍，不息似飛蓬。
問是何等色？姓貧名曰空。

The personas in Han Shan's poem they suffer from a bad situation: sickness, shortage of food, abandonment by his relatives and friends, he even has no safe place to give him shelter from the storm and rain. Even though the persona may have versed himself with good knowledge, he still could not avoid being the rootless floating grass in the world. The similarity existing among these poems is poverty, and how bad the persona living conditions are: he is so poor that his friends and kin all left him away; he is so poor that the rice container is full of dust rather than grain; he is so poor that he only

⁴⁸ The Chinese say people learn with their head but store the knowledge with their belly.

⁴⁹ *Liu-yi*, six arts included ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics.

⁵⁰ Duckweed in the Chinese culture stands for things that are rootless, homeless wanderers.

owns a caved-in bed, which could not even hold him; he is so poor that he is dubbed as Mr. Poor and Empty.

In the second poem, Ha Shan depicted Mr. Poor 's life like the floating duckweed. A set expression, the duckweed standing for things that are rootless, and it is always used as for homeless wanderers. Even though people have a good head and belly,⁵¹ they still could not deal with the problems in life; poverty and emptiness still decided their status. In the first poem, it is easy to find out Han Shan's feeling about the poverty: "Do not complain now you are so haggard and worn / Many worries must wear out people." What are all worries? The sickness, the need for food, the old and shabby house ... Poor living conditions wear people out. According to the expressions used in Han Shan's poems, it is fair to say that the poverty as suffering in common life wears people out. Reading the poems above, it is hard to catch joyful emotion in Han Shan's verse. It is, however, easy to feel his sadness and depression from his description of the persona.

5.1.2 Impermanence is Suffering

In *The First Noble Truth*, it said changes in the common life arose from dukkha.

Han Shan depicted the changing of time. Life was not like nature going forward and back. Life was the one-way trip.

The four seasons have no stop and rest;

⁵¹ Good head and belly meant to be versed with the wonderful knowledge.

When one year has gone, a new year is coming.
Ten thousand things have new life replacing the old one;
The Nine heavens⁵² have no destruction and decay.
When East becomes bright, then West changes to dark;
The petals fall, again the flowers get blossoms.
Only the travelers in the Yellow Spring,⁵³
Get into darkness and will not return.

四時無止息，年去又年來。
萬物有代謝，九天無朽摧。
東明又西暗，花落復花開。
惟有黃泉客，冥冥去不回。

Han Shan believed human life constantly changed like the petals falling. The people
in the past have disappeared and the endless ocean changed to dust.

Peach blossoms desire to grow through summer;
While the wind and moon press on and they won't wait.
When you look for the people in Han times;
Can it be that there is one existing?
Day by day petals drift and fall;
Year after year people transform and change.
Today where we raise the dust;
In the old time was the endless ocean.

桃花欲經夏，風月摧不待。
訪覓漢時人，能無一個在？⁵⁴
朝朝花遷落，歲歲人移改。
今日揚塵處，昔時為大海。

In the poems just mentioned one may easily notice the constant change that appears

⁵² The nine heavens include the sky's zenith and its eighth directions.

⁵³ Yellow Spring is the destination of the dead.

⁵⁴ The phrase “能無” literally means: Can it be that there is not? But here, in Han Shan's expression, it seems to use this phrase as a strong negation: absolutely no.

both in the space and time, in the natural world and in human life. As Han Shan said, time was always changing: “The four seasons have no stop and rest / When one year has gone, a new year is coming.” Moreover, the change also happened in the space: “Today where we raise the dust; in the old time was the endless ocean.” And the change could be seen in the natural world: “Ten thousand things have new life replacing old one / The Nine heavens⁵⁵ have no destruction and decay.” This change happened in the human life as going forward without an option to return: “Only the travelers in the Yellow Spring / Getting into darkness and will not return.” Not only Han Shan, but many Chinese poets they once noticed the changes among the heaven and earth. For example, Tao Yuanming in his poem named *The Body Talk to Shadow* (形贈影) once said: “The plants all achieved the constancy / The frost and dew flourish and wither them / It is said the human being are most intelligent and wise / Only them do not like plants can get back.” (草木得常理，霜露榮悴之。謂人最靈智，獨復不如茲). It is well known, Tao Yuanming was deeply affected by Taoism. Author Taoist Laozi illustrated change in *Dao De Jing* (道德經): The way can be talked about, is not the constant way. The name can be called, is not the constant name. Not being name is the beginning of heaven; being name is the mother of ten thousand of thing. (道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。有名天地之始，無名萬物之母。)

⁵⁵ The nine heavens include the sky’s zenith and its eighth directions.

Taoism propounded there was no constant name or constant way for everything in the world. The reason for this being that everything is continuously changing. Not only just Taoism maintained this kind of explanation for change, but Buddhist did too. According to *The Four Noble Truth* of the Buddhism, if poverty, sickness, death, and the like were included in dukkha as ordinary suffering, impermanence was the other form suffering. More specifically, a happy feeling, one joyful condition in our life, was always not permanent, not everlasting. It changed sooner or later. When the condition, circumstance or the emotion changed, they all inevitably raised up the pain, the unhappiness, the suffering. This vicissitude was believed in dukkha as suffering produced by change.

Most of people think the impermanence of things in this world is an unpleasant. When people look at the world, they may find it solid and complicated. It cannot be denied that people tend to stay in one place where they feel comfortable and safe, and they also desire this situation to last forever. In other words, people may know that things are impermanent, but they do not perceive things in that way. And this produces the problem.

Han Shan in his poems perceived things in the proper way, he understood this impermanence of the world, and he believed that change brought about the suffering, Han Shan perceived this suffering among the human world and natural world like it was a blossom which cannot get through the summer with the pressure coming from the wind and moon. Human beings are unable to live beyond their temporal limitations. This is why Han Shan writes: “Day by day the petals drift and fall / Year after year the people transform

and change.”

5.1.3 A Transient Life is Suffering

In *The First Noble Truth*, it said: aging was suffering.

Han Shan depicted living a changing profane world. There was no way to get away from secularity. This limited life brought about suffering, and constant funerals were a constant reminder of these limitations.

Once in the world, you are bound to be troubled.
Human affairs are not all alike.
People are not able to leave common customs behind;
It is these that they chase each other around.
Yesterday, we mourned Xuwu's death;
Today we take part in Liusan's funeral.
Day by day, I cannot get any leisure;
Because of this, my heart feels miserable.

出身⁵⁶既擾擾，世事非一狀。
未能捨流俗，所以相追訪。
昨吊徐五死，今送劉三葬。
日日不得閒，為此心淒愴。

Han Shan also depicted life as being limited by years. It was inevitable that one would meet with the death of relatives and friends. A short life of separation from relatives and friends gave rise to suffering.

For what reason I am always disappointed and sad?

⁵⁶ According to translator Robert G. Henricks, he believed that “*chu-shen*” (出身) means to enter government service, but I cannot agree with that. In my opinion, I believe that “*chu-shen*” is similar to “*chu-sheng*” (出生), means come to this world.

Man's life is like the morning mushroom.⁵⁷
How can one bear it for ten years,
Kin and friends decline and vanish.
Thinking of this makes me sad,
The melancholy mood I cannot bear.
O what to do? O what to do?
Abandon whole body and get back to mountain refuge.

何以長惆悵？人生似朝菌。
那堪數十年，親舊凋零盡。
以此思自艾，哀情不可忍。
奈何當奈何，托體歸山隱。

These two poems above express the sadness over a limited life-time and separation with family and old friends. This limitation makes everything in this world become impermanent. In these poems, the persona day after day took part in the funeral of the people he knew within a decade, his relatives and old friends passed away, which correspondingly gave rise to the feelings expressed in the lines: "Thinking of this makes me sad / The melancholy mood I cannot bear."

According to Buddhism, human beings are stuck in a cycle of birth-death-rebirth, before human beings are able to enter into Nirvana through enlightenment. Since Buddhism claims human being are nothing but a combination of physical and mental forces or energies, death is just the non-functioning of the physical body, just like the worn-out conditioner. But, these mental forces and energies, such as desire, will, the thirst

⁵⁷ The little mushroom that springs up in the morning and shrivels away before the night. (*Zhuang Zi*, Xiao Yao You Chapter)

to exist, to continue, or the violation, will never stop. They are the greatest force, the greatest energy in the world. And this force will not stop with the non-functioning of the body. It continues manifesting itself in another form, producing a re-existence which is called rebirth.

This birth-death-rebirth circle is seen as the continuity of dukkha, meaning the endless suffering. Since life is a combination of physical and mental energies. These are constantly changing, they do not stay the same for two consecutive moments, such as the poet said in the first poem: “To be born has been confusing, human affairs keep changing.” With the believing of Buddhism, the only way to get ride of this circle, this continuity of dukkha, is “Extinction of Thirst,” which is called Nirvana. In *Vimalakīrti sutra*, Vimalakīrti elucidated life in this way:

Upali, all phenomena are born and pass into extinction, never enduring, like phantoms, like lightning. They do not wait for one another or linger for an instant. All phenomena are the product of deluded vision, like dream, like flames, like the moon in the water or an image in a mirror, born of deluded thoughts. One who understands this is called a keeper of the precepts, one who understands this is called well liberated.”⁵⁸

Since everything is impermanent, it brings the sadness and suffering, and according to Buddhism, the only way leading to liberation is to arrive in nirvana which is out of the

⁵⁸ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, 34.

birth-death circle.

5.1.4 Desire is Suffering

In *The Second Noble Truth*, it stated that: the origin of suffering was attachment to the three kinds of desire: desire for sense pleasure, desire to become and desire to get rid of.

Han Shan depicted this when greed occupied a substance. It would spend a life-time chasing the fame and the profit, which just like the fire burned out on the candle had nothing left in the end.

Old and sick in the final years, I am more than one-hundred
years old.
Face yellow, head white, I love living in the mountains.
Cotton-fur clothes wrap my substance, I follow the fate of
causation;
Why should I envy the exquisite models in the world of
men.
Mind and spirit was used to exhaustion for getting fame
and profit.
Hundreds of kinds of greed get into one's body.
This floating life of illusion and change will go out like an
exhausted light;
When the body is buried in the grave, is this having
something or not?

老病殘年百有餘，面黃頭白好山居。
布衾擁質隨緣過，豈羨人間巧樣模。
心神用盡為名利，百種貪婪進己軀。
浮生幻化如燈盡，塚內埋身是有無。

Han Shan also depicted in the profane word, the commonly dumb men who always chase the vanity which come from the wealth and fortune. On the contrary, the right way

to live life should be seeding good karma in order to gain enlightenment.

I have seen common and dumb men;
They largely store up amounts of wealth and grain.
They drink their wine and eat the living things;
Saying words: I am rich and content.
They are unaware of the depths of Hells;
Only seek for Heavenly bliss.
But their sinful Karma is like Mount Vipula;⁵⁹
How can they avoid disaster and harm?
When the rich master suddenly dies;
His relatives will compete in weeping in front of his head.
They offer the monks to read sacred prayers;
In vain, these are the payment to spirits and ghosts.
As for blessings field, if you have no one;
It is useless to bring a crowd of heads.⁶⁰
It cannot be better than early enlightenment;
Never create dark and black Hell.
When wild winds cannot shake the trees;
The mind⁶¹ that is real has neither blessings or sin.
I send these words to the bewildered men;
I persuade you to read them again and again.

我見凡愚人，多畜資財谷。
飲酒食生命，謂言我富足。
莫知地獄深，唯求上天福。
罪業如毗富，豈得免災毒？
財主忽然死，爭共當頭哭。
供僧讀疏文，空是鬼神錄。
福田一個無，虛設一群禿。
不如早覺悟，莫作黑暗獄。
狂風不動樹，心真無罪福。
寄語兀兀人，叮嚀再三讀。

59 Mount Vipula is a large mountain near Kusagarapura in Magadha. The claim that the bones of sentient beings passing through countless lives pile up this high. Chapter 25 of Nirvana-sutra.

⁶⁰ Bald, refers to the monks and nuns.

⁶¹ The mind is *bhutatathata*, which means the essence of suchness in Buddhism.

In the first of these two poems, the persona is an old man who retreated to the mountains. He had the yellow face and white hair. He lived a poor life and did not bother to be linger in the profane world. The second persona is a rich man with excessive greed. He spent his whole life accumulating wealth, and he treated his excessive eating and drinking as a sign of the affluence. And after this rich man died, he was unable take anything with him, not his family nor his assets, for at that moment they became nothing. The second persona wasted his entire life creating and accumulating nothingness, and because he planted nothing meaningful in his life, while in the end, it was impossible to gain any blessings. This was just like the poet expressed in his second poem: “As for blessing fields/ If you have no one/ It’s useless to bring a crowd of heads.”

The Second Noble Truth, introduces the origin of dukkha, which is a “thirst,” always bounded by the passionate greed. In *What the Buddha Taught*, Buddhism believed the thirst, desire, greed, craving, manifested itself in various ways. These gave rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings. According to the Buddha’s analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arose from the selfish thirst. From this point of view, all economic, political and social problems are rooted in this selfish thirst. Just like Buddha told Rattapala: “The world lacks and hankers, and is enslaved to thirst.”⁶²

⁶² *What the Buddha Taught*, 30.

And in *Mahayana Buddhism*, it illustrated the karma⁶³ with growing:

Get a good crop of grain, there must first be a well-tilled field prepared for sowing seeds. So the appearance of a great spiritual movement in the world is to be preceded by well-cultivated minds that are ready to receive the doctrine of a holy One; for then the latter will find it easy to penetrate thoroughly into their hearts. The time was ripe now, besides the monastic religion of self-enlightenment and penance, for the seed of a religion by faith to grow and bear fruit in the well-cultivated minds.⁶⁴

Thus, the well-cultivated mind sows good as well as promise to the enlightenment practice. This idea is also expounded upon by Han Shan in the second poem. After the rich man in the second poem dies, his family spent his money inviting the monks to read prayers for him in order to receive the blessings from the heaven. This is meaningless vanity. What's the reason for this? The rich man's sinful Karma is as great as Mount Vipula.⁶⁵ How could he avoid disaster and harm? In this way, it is easy to find that Han Shan was deeply effected by the idea of Karma coming from the Buddhism. His ideas on Karma and impermanent situation allowed Han Shan to render the recluse in the first poem. The old man living in the mountain is content with his simple life and did not envy the flamboyance in the men's world. This is because he knew life is illusory and would

⁶³ Karma is translated in Chinese as “業”. It refers to the circle of situation–result.

⁶⁴ Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 63.

⁶⁵ Mount Vipula is a large mountain near Kusagarapura in Magadha. The claim that the bones of sentient beings passing through countless lives pile up this high.

extinguish in the end like a light. Affluent material alone gives one nothing in death. Since the bad deeds produce bad effects which is explained by karma, when enters into one's body, this body will become nothing but a container filled with desires. This is just like what Han Shan said in the poem: "This floating life of illusion and change will go out like an exhausted light / When the body is buried in the grave, is this having something or not?"

The figurations of the personas described above are filled with suffering. These sufferings are raised by desire and a thirst for property, rank, and longer life. And because this world is impermanent and allusive, according to Buddhism, if people want liberation from this suffering, they should eliminate their desires.

According to the analyses above, Han Shan wrote his poems in a manner similar to that of a Buddhist text, which preaches to people through parables and direct description. In Han Shan's writing, he treated Buddhist thinking and their Path as the emancipating way. He directly shared his predilection for Buddhism with other people. Thus, the contents of Han Shan's writings are different than the other poems, which mainly express aesthetic feelings in the Landscape or natural life, or talk about the aspirations to make the contributions to one's country.

5.2 Depicting Liberation in Religion

One can observe from the analysis above that Han Shan preferred to write poems in a manner similar structure to Buddhist sutras. He depicted how suffering among human beings could arise from their various desires. However, people carry the Buddha Nature with them, which has the power to remove difficulties, heal illness, and purify spirits, but these people always either neglect this nature or never recognize it in their experience. Because of this, Han Shan also tried to make people find this Buddha Nature inside their mind, and then help them attain liberation from these sufferings.

The original source of “Buddha Nature” is one of the famous parables from the *The Lotus Sutra*:

World-Honored One! It is like a man who comes to the house of an intimate companion. He becomes drunk there and lies down. At that time his companion, having official business and needing to depart, sews an invaluable gem into his clothes, giving it to him upon departure. But his friend, lying there drunk, knew nothing of this.

He later arose and went traveling and he journeyed to other lands. He went seeking everywhere in order to provide food and clothing for himself, suffering greatly in the process. When he managed to obtain even the slightest amount, he would make do with it. Later, his close companion encountered him and said to him:

Bah, old friend! How did your food and clothes get in such a state? Some time ago on such-and-such a day, because I wanted to make things easy for your so that you could enjoy the pleasures of this life, I sews an invaluable gem into your clothing. It’s still there right now, and you don’t know it! You’ve been suffering all sorts of hardships

and annoyances to make a living, and you've been a complete fool. You can now trade the gem for what you need and get whatever pleases you, with nothing lacking."

The Buddha is like this. When he was a bodhisattva, he taught and converted all of us, causing us to give rise to a mind wise in all things. And yet we immediately abandoned and have forgotten all of it and became ignorant.⁶⁶

This story expresses the belief that people have already possessed the potentiality to become enlightened, but they are simply not aware of it. Han Shan's poems can give help for people to find the "Buddha Nature" inside themselves, and then lead people to get rid off the suffering through enlightenment.

5.2.1 Living in The Cold Mountain (Han Shan) is Liberation

In *The Third Noble Truth*, it said: On the path to the end of suffering, which is a path that Buddhists may spend their whole lifetimes practicing, there are levels of happiness and freedom from craving and ignorance that can be achieved.

In one of his poems, Han Shan depicts the obstruction of the way going to the cold mountain, because the man's mind is different than Han Shan's mind.

People ask the way to Han Shan;
But there are no roads that can get through.
In the summer, the ice has not yet melted,
And though the sun comes up, the fog is still thick and
dense.
How has someone like me arrived there?

⁶⁶ Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, 164-165. This is a famous parable in lotus sutra, the jewels refers to the "Buddha Nature" which in Chinese is translated as "佛性" (*fo xing*). It is obtained by everyone originally, but most of them ignore it in the late time, then ignorance brings suffering.

My mind and yours are not the same.
If your mind were like mine,
You could come to the inside of Han Shan

人問寒山道，寒山路不通。
夏天冰未釋，日出霧朦朧。
似我何由屈，與君心不同。
君心若似我，還得到其中。⁶⁷

Living among the layer after layer mountains and stream, going to directions with
traveling shoes, no more the limitation coming from the profane world, no need do
anything for the illusion dream, were all the liberation.

Layer after layer of beautiful mountains and streams;
Fog and rosy clouds lock the light green.
Brushed by mountain mists, my silk headband gets wet;
The dews dampen my straw raincoat.
On my feet are my traveling shoes;
My hands hold the old brunch-wood of cane.
Again I watch beyond the dusty world.
As for dream realm, what is for?

層層山水秀，煙霞鎖翠微。
嵐拂紗巾濕，露沾衰草衣。
足躡遊方履，手執古藤枝。
更觀塵世外，夢境復何為？

The recluse preferred to the mountain living with accompany by the natures. In this
leisure and joyful time, there was no disturb coming from world affair, just keep the mind
pure like lotus:

⁶⁷ “*qi zhong*” (其中) means the center of the mountain, but more importantly means the center of self, and inside of Buddha nature.

When the recluse escapes from the world of men;
Many of them go towards to the mountains to sleep.
The green vines sparsely grow in profusion;
The green jade streams echo unbroken.
Steady and slow, moreover I am contented with joy;
Leisurely, I keep myself calm purity.
Avoiding to get tainted by world affairs;
Mind remains as pure as the white lotus.

隱士遁人間，多向山中眠。
青蘿疏麓麓，碧澗響聯聯。
騰騰且安樂，悠悠自清閒。
免有染世事，心淨如白蓮。

In these poems, Han Shan describes life in the mountains. The emotion within these poems is very different from the suffering poems. These are more peaceful, for example, in the third poem he writes: “Steady and slow, moreover I am contented with joy/ Leisurely, I keep myself calm purity.” The descriptions on the mountain differ from that in the men’s world, they are more pure. In the third poem he writes: “The green vines sparsely grow in profusion / The green jade streams echo with unbroken.” and in the second poem he also describes a pure scene: “Layer after layer of the beautiful mountains and streams / Fog and rosy clouds cloak the light green.”

In these three poems, the personas are all recluses who lived in the mountains and enjoyed the natural world. According to Buddhist thoughts, there is one kind of person who can achieve liberation from suffering: the recluse. They can rid themselves of suffering because they keep away from the noisy profane world. They can also obtain a different mind from the normal one, like the first poem said: “How has someone like me

arrived there/ My mind and yours are not the same.”

5.2.2 Achieving the Buddha Nature is Liberation

Han Shan depicted emptiness inside home and cave where it was clean and shiny. The body just needs the simple food and clothes because there is the genuine Buddha kept in the mind.

In my home, there is one cave;
In the cave, there is no thing.
Clean and empty with magnificent brilliant light;
The brightness is sun-like day by day.
The vegetarian foods nurse my insubstantial body;
The cotton and fur cover my illusionary substance.
Let your thousands sages appear;
I have my genuine Buddha.

余家有一窟，窟中無一物。
淨潔空堂堂，光華明日日。
蔬食養微軀，布衾遮幻質。
任你千聖現，我有天真佛。⁶⁸

Living and death comes and goes in a circle and has no end. If people could not catch up with the priceless jewel in their mind, their mind becomes blind, and they will get lost.

One thousand lives, ten thousand deaths;
When will they come to an end?
Life and death, they come and go,
Turning into confusion.
They don't know in the heart,
There is the priceless jewel.

⁶⁸ “*tian-zhen-fo*” (天真佛) is similar to “*fa-shen-fo*” (法身佛), the dharmakaya Buddha. The highest three bodies of the Buddha are sambhogakaya (报身), nirmanakaya (应身), and dharmakaya (法身).

Just like a blind donkey,
Trusts his feet walking.
千生萬死何時已，
生死來去轉迷情。
不識心中無價寶，
恰似盲驢信腳行。

The first poem seemingly talks about the house and the cave of the persona. It is essentially talking about the persona's body, mind. The nothingness in the cave is actually a metaphor for the nothingness in the mind. In the second poem, the last couplet said there is the priceless jewel in the heart which is as same as "the gem" in the *Lotus Sutra*, which means to the "Buddha Nature."

As for the personas in the poems, they are all enlightened people who can recognize the "priceless jewel" in their mind, like the first poems says: "Clean and empty with magnificent brilliant light / The brightness is sun like day by day." This passage describes the situation of a mind when it obtains the priceless jewel from their own nature. We know the priceless jewel in the poems is the "Buddha Nature." So what is the "Buddha Nature"? Actually, the Mahayanists believed the "Buddha Nature" meant the same thing as Suchness, not just being identified with nothingness or emptiness. In *Mahayana Buddhism*, Beatrice Lane Suzuki explained Suchness as seeing things as they are, more specifically, Suchness meant to go back to a state of mind before the division of knowing. The knowledge of Suchness was therefore the knowledge of non-discrimination.⁶⁹ Buddhist

⁶⁹ Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 16.

thought maintains this world is one illusion, and filled with dualities. If men's mind were divided by the knowing and discrimination, the Dharma or Reality would lose sight of the Buddha mind, and their minds would be defiled.

From this, it is not hard to understand that Suchness means Reality, or “being so,” and it suggests an idea of substance or self-nature. According to the translator Robert. G Henricks, when he made the translation for the poems of Han Shan, he believed the words “*tian-zhen fo*” (天真佛) were the ultimate reality underlying everything in this world, which means Suchness in the Buddhism. Moreover, the persona in the first poems treats his body as the insubstantial body and the illusory substance. In this way, it shows the point that poet has already recognized the substance of this world as illusory and impermanent. This was reason why there was one cave; in the cave, there was nothing. And this nothingness represents liberation from suffering because all substances are illusory in the common world. They may bring about various pains and difficulties. Priceless jewel-Suchness in people's minds is the real gem, it can lead people to the differentiation of illusion and then to enlightenment.

5.2.3 The Enlightened Can Lead to Liberation

Han Shan writes about the visiting monk who has attained enlightenment. The monk gives path of enlightenment as clear as the moon giving light in the sky.

In my leisure time, in person I go to visit the eminent
monk;

As for the mountains in mist, they have ten thousand layers.
The Master by himself points out the returning way;
The moon hangs in the sky, like a circular lamp.⁷⁰

閒時訪高僧，煙山萬萬層。
師親指歸路，月掛一輪燈。

Han Shan also depicts the truly enlightening people. They look at the things as they originally are. They could get to the realm of Buddha without help of explanation because no wrong mental senses arise in them.

I have seen a person with keen sharpness and wisdom;
He observes things immediately then knows what it means.
As does not depend on looking in literature and writings;
But directly enters into the realm of Buddha.
His mind does not chase karmic cause and effect.
His mental senses do not wrongly rise up.
When the mental senses are not born;
Inside and out, there are no remaining affairs.

我見利智人，觀者便知意。
不假尋文字，直入如來地。
心不逐諸緣，意根不妄起。
心意不生時，內外無餘事。

In Buddhism, “The Path” leads to the cessation of dukkha. According to Han Shan’s poems above, the poet was affected by Buddhist thought, since his poems were filled with Buddhist thoughts. In the first poem, Han Shan created a persona who got help from the Buddhist master. During his journey, the persona traveled through ten thousand tiers

⁷⁰ According to Henricks, in his book *The Poetry of Han Shan*, he believed in Zen, the transmission of the truth is sometimes called the transmission of the lamp.

mist in the mountains, which were like illusion or dualism in profane world. Since life is shrouded by illusion, people are unable to see the true nature of life, unable to find out the genuine Suchness in their mind. This gives rise to various desires and thirsts, which are the origins of suffering. The eminent monk in the first poem then points out the returning way, which was like the shiny moon hanging in the sky. Generally, the moon in Buddhist thought is used as metaphor, always relating to emancipation or enlightenment, because the moon can bring one cool relief, which contrasts to the suffering of heat. Moreover, its pure brightness is similar to the light of wisdom and genuine nature in the world. Thus, the speaker here used the moon as a metaphor for enlightenment in people's mind.

In the second poem, the persona has a king's sharpness and wisdom. He treats everything in their original way and takes things for what they are. He does not need any help from the Buddhist writings, but can still arrive at the realm of Buddha. It is because he has no wrong mental sense, so he can get rid of the obstacle in his mind. This wise poem created by Han Shan is very similar to Vimalakīrti who is characterized as a wealthy patron of Gautama Buddha in the Mahayana Buddhism. In the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, he is a bodhisattva with wisdom and dwells in the emancipation beyond comprehension. His words and explanation for Buddhist thoughts are very persuasive and enlightening. They make numerous heavenly sons set their minds on attaining

anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁷¹ In the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, Vimalakīrti once illustrated how to get rid of the attachment and become a bodhisattva in the dialogue with Manjushri:

Manjushri asked Vimalakīrti: “Layman, how should a bodhisattva who is ill go about tempering and controlling his mind?”

Vimalakīrti replied: “A bodhisattva who is ill should think to himself: Now these illnesses of mine all spring from the deluded thoughts, the upside-down thinking and various earthly desires of my past existence. They have no real existence, so who is it, who suffers illness? Why? The four major elements come together, and therefore we apply a makeshift name, calling the thing a body. But the four major elements⁷² have no master, and the body has no “I” or ego. And these illnesses too all arise from attachment to ego. Therefore, I should harbor no such attachment to ego. And I will treat everything in the world as equal, once one has acquired this kind of equal outlook, one will be freed from all other illness and will have only the illness of emptiness, and the illness of emptiness too is empty. Manjushri, if people fail to do so, then all his religious practice and accomplishment in the past will be void of wisdom or profit. A person who has overcome a sworn enemy deserves to be called a hero. In the same way, one who has cut off both old age, sickness, and death may be called a bodhisattva.”⁷³

In this dialogue, Vimalakīrti’s words explain what Han Shan was attempting to say:

“The Buddha’s mind did not chase for the collective karmic cause effect. The mental senses did not wrongly rise up.” The persona in Han Shan’s poem treats the wise one as

⁷¹ Supreme Perfect Enlightenment; Supreme Correct Awakening.

⁷² Four major elements refer to earth, water, air, and fire.

⁷³ Burton Waston, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, 70-71.

his leaders to emancipation. It is fair to speculate that Han Shan got helpful inspiration from the wise believers like Shi-de, or the Buddhist texts like *Lotus Sutra*, *Vimalakīrti Sutra*. He then put their teaching inside his poems. In this way he could help more people through persuasion in his writings. It is easy to return to the say: Han Shan is the incarnation of Manjusri.

Han Shan successfully made a comparison between the profane and sacred worlds in his poems. On one hand he wrote about the sufferings and sorrows in the profane world, for example, “Yesterday, we mourned Xuwu’s death / Today we take part in Liusan’s funeral / Day by day, I cannot get any leisure / Because of this, my heart feels miserable.” or “For what reason I am always disappointed and sad / Man’s life is like the morning mushroom / How could one bear it for ten years / Kin and old friends decline and vanish.” On the other hand, he wrote about liberation which was attained by keeping away from the profane world and preaching Buddhism, for example: “Steady and slow, moreover I am contented with joy / Leisurely, I keep myself calm purity / Avoiding to get tainted by the world affairs / Mind remains as pure as the white lotus.” or “To wipe out the evil karma / To enter the path of Buddha, accept the true nature / Today you will obtain the Buddhist body / You should act as quick as if by imperial command.” From this comparison, one can observe there is a transmission of the profane world to the sacred world, this is also a feature of Han Shan’s Religious World.

When expressing this religion world, Han Shan also took advantage of many

symbolizing words. For example, Han Shan described his mind with emptiness in this way: “In my home, there is one cave / In the cave, there is no thing / Clean and empty with magnificent brilliant light / The brightness is sun like day by day.” Han Shan illustrates the conception of “*kong*” (空), emptiness, which comes from the Buddhist thoughts in these lines. Even though many of the Buddhist sutra and writings had their definition or explanation for this word, Han Shan created his own way of illustrating it. He used that empty room as an analogy to his pure and void mind. Though this Buddhist word was expressed in this indirect and unreligious way, it still made people deeply and clearly understand the Buddhist thoughts coming from the poet. In addition, Han Shan also utilized the symbolizing images to construct his Religious world; for example, the moon, the white lotus, the layer after layer of mountains and streams, the fog, and “The green vines sparsely grow in profusion,” “The green jade streams echo with unbroken,” etc. Even though these were all common natural things, Han Shan added extra meaning to them. He made them become bricks for his Religious World. Through the mountain mist and the dew soaked raincoat, the people are able to understand why the persona in the poem can see beyond the dusty world. Through the green vines and the jade-like streams, people can feel satisfaction from the steadiness and joy described in the poem. When these symbols are tied together, they directly reflect Han Shan’s Buddhist thinking and become a significant part of Han Shan’s Religious World.

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